

## **BLACK BEAR BAITING IN ALASKA**

### **Alaska Department of Fish and Game**

A public initiative to ban black bear baiting in Alaska has been approved to collect signatures for placement on a state ballot in 2004. Black bear baiting is used as a wildlife management tool that provides a great deal of hunting opportunity in the state. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) respects the diversity of public opinions about bear baiting and recognizes that people hold a variety of values, attitudes and levels of acceptance. We believe that bear baiting is a significant wildlife management issue and offer the following information for your consideration.

- ▶ Black bears are widely distributed and abundant in Alaska. Statewide populations are healthy; and probably number between 100,000 and 200,000.
- ▶ Only black bears may be hunted at bait stations. Brown/grizzly bears may not be taken with the use of bait.
- ▶ Black bear baiting is allowed in most but not all Game Management Units (Units). The Alaska Board of Game (Board) has adopted regulations for bait stations designed to reduce conflicts with other uses, including prohibitions near residences, trails, roads, certain streams, and other facilities, as well as a requirement to remove all bait and contaminated soil from bait sites at the end of the hunting season.
- ▶ To hunt black bears at bait stations in most road system units, hunters must attend a bear baiting clinic. The Department's clinics are an important part of the permitting system which is intended to make hunters aware of and abide by regulations and procedures that encourage the best hunting practices possible.
- ▶ Thorough examination of harvest data "defense of life and property" reports (bears taken by individuals in self defense, or to protect property), and nuisance bear complaints logged by ADF&G offices suggest that baiting is neither harmful to black bear populations nor that baiting results in nuisance black bear problems.
- ▶ There are no results from scientific studies to prove or disprove the contention that bear baiting teaches bears to seek human food/garbage around human habitations. However, areas in Alaska where black bear baiting is most commonly practiced are among those with the lowest incidence of both a) bear nuisance complaints and b) bears taken in defense of life and property.
- ▶ Because bears can be observed at close range at a bait station, baiting maximizes the opportunity to make quick and humane kills and to reduce wounding losses. Baiting also provides the opportunity for hunters to be more selective in the size and sex of bear they shoot, and to more effectively avoid taking females with cubs.
- ▶ In heavily forested habitats in Interior Alaska, bear baiting is the most effective method for harvesting black bears. For example, more than 70% of the black bears taken in Units 20A, B, C and F are taken at bait stations, and this harvest is well within sustained yield. If bear baiting is prohibited, it is highly unlikely that hunters will be able to continue this level of harvest by other hunting techniques.
- ▶ During the past 11 years:
  - About 20% of 23,111 black bears harvested in Alaska were taken at bait stations.
  - The number of black bear baiting permits issued to the public averaged 1,318 per year; ranging from a low of 641 to a high of 1,767.
  - The largest numbers of black bear baiting permits have been issued for Units 20B (348), 14A (131), and 7 (108).
  - Four Units have averaged 51-100 black bear baiting permits per year, four have averaged 26-50 permits per year, seven have averaged 11-25 permits per year, and 35 have averaged 0-10 permits per year.